

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0309

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY JAR ES SALAAM POUCH

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: VISIT TO FRANCISTOWN/SELEBI-PIKWE REFUGEE CAMPS

1. SUMMARY: ACCOMPANIED BY IRO AND AID EMBOFFS, I MADE MY FIRST VISIT JULY 27 TO BOTSWANA CAMPS FOR ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES IN FRANCISTOWN AND SELEBI-PIKWE. THE VISIT WAS CARRIED OUT IN COMPANY WITH LEADING DISTRICT AND CITY OFFICIALS. A REPRESENTATIVE OF PRESIDENT'S OFFICE (TEBAPE) AND LOCAL UNHCR REP (PERKINS) WERE ALSO MEMBERS OF OUR PARTY THROUGHOUT THE DAY. AFTER MONTHS OF INDECISION WHILE WEIGHING RISKS, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES, GOB NOW APPEARS TO HAVE MADE UP ITS MIND WHAT IT WANTS TO DO WITH REFUGEES. THE POLICY IS TO ADMIT THEM FREELY BUT CONTROL THEM CAREFULLY. SECURITY IS COMMENSURATE WITH THE PERCEIVED THREAT FROM RHODESIA. THIS MESSAGE SUMMARIZES THE ATMOSPHERE, SECURITY CONDITIONS AND SOME OF THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES ENCOUNTERED. LATER FOLLOW-UP REPORT WILL DETAIL NUMBERS, FLOW OF REFUGEES, CAMP CONDITIONS AND REFUGEE

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POLITICS; A THIRD MESSAGE WILL DESCRIBE GOB REFUGEE RELIEF POLICY AND PLANS ALONG WITH THOUGHTS ABOUT REFUGEE ASSISTANCE AND WHERE IT MAY OVERLAP WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. ATMOSPHERE. COMING FROM GABORONE, WHERE THE SIGHT OF A UNIFORMED POLICEMAN IS RARE AND THE BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE (BDF) IS STILL AN ODDITY CONFINED LARGELY TO STATE HOUSE

SECURITY, A VISIT TO FRANCISTOWN (350 MILES NORTH) 17
KILOMETERS FROM RHODESIAN BORDER, TAKES ONE INTO A DIFFERENT
WORLD. UPON ARRIVAL BY PLANE IN FRANCISTOWN, A POLICEMAN WAS
ON HAND TO MEET US ALONG WITH DISTRICT COMMISSIONER (D.C.)
MASALILA. SEVERAL ARMED POLICE OR BDF SURROUNDED US THROUGHOUT
OUR STAY THERE AND AT SELEBI-PIKWE. THIS PROTECTION WAS BEST
EVIDENCE OF LOCAL CONCERNS WHICH ARE DOMINATED BY THE FEARED
AND UNPREDICTABLE REGIME IN RHODESIA. IT IS THE ACTION OF THAT
REGIME, PARTICULARLY ITS OPPRESSION IN COMBATING "TERRORISM"
IN RHODESIA, THAT ACCOUNTS (MORE THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE FACTOR)
FOR THE FLOW OF REFUGEES. THE SAME RHODESIAN REGIME, IN ITS
ANXIETY TO IDENTIFY AND PUNISH THOSE WHO SYMPATHIZE WITH
AND SUPPORT "FREEDOM FIGHTERS", IS BELIEVED CAPABLE OF MOUNTING
ARMED ATTACKS AGAINST BOTSWANA -- AND THE REFUGEES. THE RESULT
IS A GENUINE FEAR AND DISLIKE OF THE RHODESIAN REGIME BY
BOTSWANA PEOPLE AND WIDE-RANGING SECURITY MEASURES BY GOB
TO DETER ANY ATTACK. IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED AT THIS POINT
THAT THERE WAS UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT AMONG PERHAPS TWO DOZEN
GOB OFFICIALS AND REFUGEES WE SPOKE WITH THAT RECRUITMENT
EFFORTS BY THE NATIONALISTS WERE NOT A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR
IN REFUGEE MOTIVATIONS.

3. THE MOST VISIBLE SECURITY MEASURES AT BOTH CAMPS ARE THE
HIGH BARBED WIRE FENCES AND THE BDF GUARDS AT THE CAMP GATES.
GOB OFFICIALS INSISTED THAT THE MAIN OBJECTIVE WAS PROTECTION
OF THE REFUGEES FROM RHODESIAN RAIDS, NOT CONCERN THAT THE
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REFUGEES THEMSELVES WOULD CREATE PROBLEMS IF THEY WANDERED
AROUND TOWN. FEAR OF THE RHODESIAN REGIME IS ALSO THE OVER-
HANGING THREAT UNDERLYING THE GOB POLICY OF NOT ALLOWING
POLITICAL MEETINGS IN CAMPS, MARCHING, FORMATIONS OR GATHERINGS
THAT MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS "MILITARY TRAINING" AND THEREFORE
SERVE AS PRETEXT FOR RHODESIAN RAID. (LIGHT CALISTHENICS
ARE PERMITTED, HOWEVER, ALONG WITH CAREFULLY SUPERVISED AND
MONITORED SOCCER GAMES.) FINALLY, THE SAME THREAT FROM RHODESIA
CAN BE SAID TO INSPIRE DISCIPLINE AND OBEDIENCE AMONG THE
REFUGEES; EXCEPT FOR SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA SUPPORTERS, IT IS
WHAT REFUGEES ARE PREPARING TO TRAIN AND FIGHT AGAINST.
ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE THREAT (AND GOB REACTION TO IT)
CAN BE SEEN BY A VISIT TO THE MOPHANE CLUB, WHERE A GRENADE
WAS THROWN MAY 6 THAT KILLED THREE BATSWANA AND WOUNDED
SOME 50. THIS INCIDENT EFFECTIVELY CLOSED ONE (OF TWO) PRIVATE
RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE FRANCISTOWN AREA; EVENING DANCING
AND MOVIES HAVE STILL NOT RESUMED AT MOPHANE FOR FEAR (WE
WERE TOLD) THAT "IT MIGHT HAPPEN AGAIN".

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4. SECURITY. WITH RHODESIA SO CLOSE (17 KILOMETERS-12 MILES)
AND GOB VIRTUALLY DEFENSELESS IN THE FACE OF ITS POWERFUL
NEIGHBOR, THE GOB CONCERN ABOUT SECURITY IS UNDERSTANDABLE.
(ONE POLICE SUPERINTENDANT SAID HE HAD PERSONALLY SEEN TWO
RHODESIAN MILITARY HELICOPTERS OVERFLYING BOTSWANA.) WITH SOME
1200 POTENTIAL "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" IN THE AREA (ALTHOUGH DOWN
FROM A PEAK OF OVER 3000), THE THREAT FROM RHODESIA STILL
SEEMS REAL. TO COUNTER IT, A WIDE RANGE OF MEASURES ARE IN
EFFECT. VIEWED IN CONTEXT, THESE MEASURES ARE THE LEAST ONE
WOULD EXPECT. SOME APPLY GENERALLY IN THE REGION, SUCH AS
ROADBLOCKS ON THE MAIN ROADS. THEY ARE MANNED BY REGULAR,
TRAINING FORCES, THE D.C. MASALILA TOLD US. STILL, WORK HAS
STOPPED ON A ROAD-BUILDING PROJECT NEAR THE BORDER BECAUSE OF
SECURITY CONCERNS. THE REFUGEE CAMPS THEMSELVES ARE, AS NOTED
ABOVE, SURROUNDED BY BARBED WIRE AND BY ARMED GUARDS. AT
FRANCISTOWN, THE CAMP IS OLD AND RUNDOWN, RESEMBLING A COLLECTION
OF A HALF-DOZEN ABANDONED WAREHOUSES. THERE WERE 384 REFUGEES
IN THAT CAMP ON JULY 27. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS THAT OF A LARGE
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GATHERING OF SHANTY-TOWN DWELLERS ON A PERPETUAL COOKOUT.
BIG IRON POTS HEATED BY WOODEN LOGS WERE PREPARING GRUEL FOR
REFUGEES. EXCEPT FOR THE COOKING CREW, REFUGEES LOUNGE ON COTS

INSIDE THE BARRACKS OR UNDER A LARGE OUTDOOR SLEEPING PAVILLION. WHEREVER WE WALKED, WE WERE ACCOMPANIED BY SECURITY OFFICIALS, ALTHOUGH AT NO POINT DID WE SEE HOSTILE REACTIONS (ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT SURE THAT THE REFUGEES KNEW WHO WE WERE).

5. AT SELEBI-PIKWE, BY CONTRAST, THE CAMP HAS THE AIR OF NEW ARMY BARRACKS. ALTHOUGH REFUGEES WORE THE SAME COLLECTION OF OLD CLOTHES, THE BETTER SURROUNDINGS MADE THEM LOOK HEALTHIER AND BETTER PROVIDED FOR. IN FACT, THIS MAY HAVE BEEN TRUE. WE SAW THE FOOD AVAILABLE TO THEM WHICH INCLUDED BEANS AND MEAT AS WELL AS THE (MEALY-MEAL) GRUEL. THE SECURITY WAS VIRTUALLY THE SAME AT BOTH CAMPS ALTHOUGH SELEBI-PIKWE IS ABOUT 70 KILOMETERS (42 MILES) FROM A LESS TENSE BORDER AREA. EXPLANATION FOR THE SECURITY WAS THE SAME, NAMELY THAT RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES MIGHT AT ANY TIME DECIDE TO "STRIKE AGAIN". WHEN ASKED WHAT FORM THE RAIDS MIGHT TAKE, ONE POLICE CHIEF SAID GOB STILL FEARED RETALIATION AGAINST THE CAMPS BECAUSE OF DECISION OF NEARLY 400 STUDENTS TO LEAVE MANAMA SCHOOL AND COME TO BOTSWANA IN FEBRUARY. A BDF OFFICIAL COMMENTED THAT GOB KNEW THAT RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE LOCATED THE "UNDERGROUND" ROUTE BY WHICH YOUNG RHODESIANS ESCAPE TO BOTSWANA. RECENTLY, GOB GOT WORD THAT RHODESIAN FORCES INTENDED TO "AMBUSH" A GROUP OF YOUNG "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" TRAVELING THE UNDERGROUND -- AND THAT THE AMBUSH WOULD TAKE PLACE IN BOTSWANA. REFUGEE CAMP COMMANDERS THOUGHT SMITH OR A HEADY LOCAL RHODESIAN COMMANDER MIGHT AT ANY TIME ORDER A RAID ON FRANCISTOWN OR SELEBI-PIKWE CAMPS IN ORDER TO CREATE DISORDER, DESTROY AND DEMORALIZE NKOMO/MUGABE RECRUITS.

6. THE GOB SECURITY MEASURES ARE DIRECTED PRIMARILY AGAINST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RHODESIAN THREAT. BUT THEY AFFECT ALL PEOPLE IN THE AREA. THUS THE GOB SEPARATES REFUGEES FROM THE BATSWANA PEOPLE, I.E., WHILE THE INHABITANTS IN BOTH CITIES ARE AWARE OF REFUGEE CAMPS, THE PEOPLE ONLY RARELY SEE REFUGEES THEMSELVES. AT FRANCISTOWN, FOR EXAMPLE, FOR SICK CALL REFUGEES ARE TAKEN BY TRUCK TO THE HOSPITAL WHERE THEY STAND IN LINE AND COMPETE FOR SERVICES WITH OTHERS AWAITING MEDICAL TREATMENT. AT SELEBI-PIKWE, ISOLATION FROM THE CITIZENRY IS MORE COMPLETE. AUTHORITIES HAVE BUILT A CLINIC WITHIN THE CAMP WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT MEDICAL SERVICES WILL BE BROUGHT TO THE CAMP.

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7. POLITICAL VIEWS. BETWEEN THE GOB AUTHORITIES AND THE REFUGEES, ESTABLISHED CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION EXIST, PRINCIPALLY THROUGH CAMP LEADERS. I MET WITH TWO NKOMO LEADERS. (ONE WAS INTRODUCED TO US IN CAMP, LATER THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER BROUGHT TWO TO THE HOTEL TO HAVE REFRESHMENTS WITH US BEFORE LUNCH.) THE D.C. COMMENTED ON THE CONSIDERABLE PROBLEM HE FACES IN AVOIDING ACCUSATIONS OF FAVORING ONE NATIONALIST GROUP, OR ITS IDEAS, AGAINST ANOTHER. WITHIN THE CAMPS, NO BARRIERS SEPARATE THE VARIOUS NATIONALIST FACTIONS (ALTHOUGH ALL SITHOLE-MUZOREWA REFUGEES ARE NOW AT SELEBI-PIKWE). AT BOTH CAMPS AUTHORITIES TOLD US THEY WERE UNAWARE OF ANY INCIDENTS AMONG THE NATIONALIST FACTIONS (THIS CONTRARY TO REPORTS HEARD HERE). HOWEVER, THERE ARE FRICTIONS BETWEEN THE GOB AUTHORITIES AND THE REFUGEES. A CAMP "SUPERVISOR" (A YOUNG LOCAL GIRL ON A SUMMER JOB) COMPLAINED THAT THE MUGABE SUPPORTERS WERE UNCOOPERATIVE, E.G., THEY FAILED TO DO THEIR SHARE OF CLEANING AND MONITORING THE LIVING QUARTERS. (CLEARLY, SHE HAD EXCHANGED WORDS WITH THE CAMP INHABITANTS ON

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THE SUBJECT.) IN GENERAL, THERE WAS A REMARKABLE DEGREE OF CALM AND APPARENT HARMONY IN BOTH CAMPS. THIS IS PARTLY EXPLAINED BY THE FACT THAT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SEVERAL HUNDRED SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE NO PLACE TO GO, THE NKOMO/MUGABE PEOPLE ARE IN TRANSIT TO ZAMBIA. THEY EXPECT TO REMAIN IN THE CAMPS FOR NO MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS AT MOST. WE CONFIRMED THAT THE FLIGHTS TO ZAMBIA HAVE NOT BEEN INTERRUPTED AND

THEREFORE THE PROSPECT OF ONWARD MOVEMENT HELPS TO LIGHTEN THE BURDEN OF CAMP BOREDOM. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S., AS REFLECTED BY THE NATIONALIST FACTION LEADERS AND GOB OFFICIALS, WERE GENERALLY CHARACTERIZED BY LACK OF KNOWLEDGE. THUS NO ONE I MET, NATIONALIST OR GOB, WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE ANGLO-AMERICAN INITIATIVE. THE GOB OFFICIALS AGREED WE SHOULD TRY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS, GIVEN OUR MUTUAL INTEREST IN A PEACEFUL, RATHER THAN A VIOLENT, SOLUTION IN ZIMBABWE. OUR KEY MAILING LIST WILL HENCEFORTH INCLUDE THE BOTSWANA OFFICIALS -- WHO WILL CHANNEL INFORMATION TO NATIONALIST LEADERS.

8. COMMENT: AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF HESITATION AND INDECISION, THE GOB SEEMS TO HAVE DETERMINED HOW IT INTENDS TO HANDLE ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES AND THE ACCOMPANYING SECURITY CONCERNS. DESPITE SOME GLARING SHORTCOMINGS (I.E., AT FRANCISTOWN), BOTH CAMP ADMINISTRATORS AND SECURITY FORCES ARE DOING AS GOOD A JOB AS CAN BE EXPECTED. THE UNHCR HAS BEEN JOLTED OUT OF COMPLACENCY BY SUCCESSIVE COMPLAINTS AND IS ASSISTING -- ALTHOUGH NOT AS LIBERALLY AS ITS RESOURCES WOULD PERMIT. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT GOB POLICY IS NOT (REPEAT NOT) TO MAKE REFUGEE LIFE TOO ATTRACTIVE FOR FEAR OF FURTHER INFLUX. WHAT THE U.S. MIGHT DO AT THIS STAGE IN ADDITION TO MAKING ITS HELPFUL CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNHCR (AND MINIMIZING VISITS TO THE CAMP) WILL BE SUBJECT OF SEPTTEL.
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